

# Snapshot of Discrimination in Huron County

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## Introduction

The Huron County Immigration Partnership (HCIP) partnered with the Research Shop, part of the Community Engaged Scholarship Institute at the University of Guelph, to provide a snapshot of the experiences of discrimination of racial minorities, immigrants, and Indigenous residents in Huron County. To better understand the experiences of individuals in the local community, HCIP was interested in interviewing people from the local community to capture qualitative information. The data collected from the in-depth interviews (n=4) is presented in this report. Results from this project can be used to generate local knowledge and build capacities within the community around diversity and inclusion.

Huron County is the study site for this project. This land is the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Neutral peoples and is connected to the Dish with One Spoon wampum. It has a population of 61,366 (Statistics Canada 2022). The Indigenous population includes 625 First Nations individuals and 450 Metis. The visible minority population is approximately 1,130 residents (Statistics Canada 2022).

## Methods

This project was reviewed and approved by the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. The partner organization, HCIP, was responsible for participant recruitment and distributed a poster to their partners via social media. Participants interested in the study filled out a Qualtrics form (a secure, online platform) that served as both the screening and consent to participate. The



recruitment poster and Qualtrics form were available in English, Arabic, and Spanish. To participate in the study, participants had to live in Huron County, identify as a racial minority, immigrant, and/or Indigenous, and be 18 years of age or older. The screening guide also allowed participants to choose whether they would like to have an individual or group interview and collected their contact information to schedule the interview.

Interviews were held online using Zoom, Microsoft Teams or on the phone from November to December 2022. Interviews were conducted by a team of two researchers – one to facilitate and one to take notes.<sup>1</sup> Interview questions centred around three main themes including: sense of belonging, experiences of discrimination, and visions of the future. Following the interviews, the interviewer and notetaker held a debrief session to record field notes. The interviews typically lasted between thirty minutes to one hour. Consent was sought at the beginning of the interview and established throughout the interview during periods of sensitive questions, and as a final question at the end. Overall, four interviews were conducted and included in the study.

Data analysis was performed through a grounded theory approach which allows for themes to emerge from the data (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Coding was organized using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Each interview was initially coded separately by two research assistants and then a collaborative session was held where the final code was decided upon. These codes were then made into a formal codebook and codes were organized into broad themes.

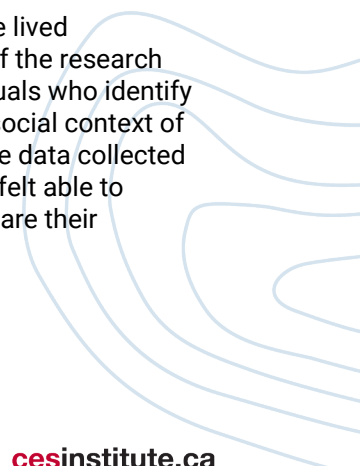
## Results & Discussion


### Description of Participants

The small sample size of this study provides a snapshot into the experiences of discrimination in Huron County. Three women and one man participated with the average age of participants being 38 years old. There were two Black participants, one Metis participant, and one Indian participant. In relation to religion, three participants stated they were Christians and one participant reported they were Spiritual. Half the respondents had lived in the county for a long time (over twenty years) and half were more recent residents, relocating to Huron within the past two years. Three participants were Canadian citizens, and one was a temporary resident.

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<sup>1</sup> Note on positionality: Research on racial discrimination is shaped and influenced by the lived experiences of the researchers as well. We acknowledge that the various backgrounds of the research team, which included white settler-Canadians, visible minorities, immigrants, and individuals who identify as disabled and queer, might have influenced the way that participants responded. The social context of our lived experiences as researchers also influences the ways in which we interpreted the data collected through this study. In reviewing the post-interview field notes, researchers reported they felt able to develop connections with participants throughout the interviews that allowed them to share their experiences.





When examining social inequality, it is important to take an intersectional approach. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing complexities in people's experiences. Conditions between the self, social, and political life is not shaped by one factor (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). As such, intersectionality can be understood as the advantages and disadvantages (or privilege and oppression) that people experience based on their overlapping social and political identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, cultural identity, sex, gender, sexuality, class, ability) (Crenshaw, 1989). That is, when it comes to social inequality, people's experiences and the organization of power are best understood as being shaped not by a single marker of social division, but by many markers that work together and influence each other (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016).

## Sense of Belonging

All participants had overall positive descriptions of their connections to the broader community. They cited activities like joining a gym, playing sports, going to church, and engaging in their children's school activities as ways to find a sense of belonging and build community.

Only one participant discussed being engaged with a group connected to their racial/ethnic identity. The other participants expressed difficulty in finding others in their racial/ethnic group to connect with.


All participants felt that Huron County was safe and welcoming. However, two participants noted that they felt unwelcome by their extended family. They shared that their partners are white, and their in-laws are not welcoming, and had stereotypical prejudices.


## Experiences of Discrimination

All participants reported personal experiences of discrimination with some elaborating on witnessing discrimination as well. Experiences included overt comments and insults, microaggressions, and differential treatment in public spaces due to race.

Public spaces where discrimination was described included the hospital, church, school, sporting events/locker rooms, workplaces, restaurants, and shops. The illustrative quotes below provide some insight into these experiences. Each quote comes from a different participant.

*"At the hospital, they treat other people better. You're trying to make it to your appointment, but I have experienced that the nurses/other staff aren't interested in what you have to say. [They] attend more quickly to white people. Don't seem excited to see you. [This is a] form of discrimination because they don't do the same thing to white people."*





*"There have been a couple times when I was followed in stores and its usually with my dad because he is Indigenous, and they think we are going to steal or something."*

*"My child faces discrimination a bit in his school. I just hope for the best."*

*"In my workplace - no one greets the people of color that are new. They don't welcome the new ones; I have been there, so they respect me, but it is not the same... But we need a job, so we tolerate it."*

Two participants explicitly described white people as perpetrators of discrimination, with one of those respondents noting that it was mostly from the older generation and conservatives.

There were no substantial changes in experiences of discrimination related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Impacts of Discrimination

The experiences of discrimination had detrimental effects on participants' mental health. Two participants described their feelings about these experiences as awful, upsetting, and feeling the need to hide away. For example, two participants shared:

*"Feel very bad. Very sad most times. Most times just walk away...Try to get out of the situation"*

*"Angry, hurt. Sometimes I am scared to say what I am because of how people will react"*

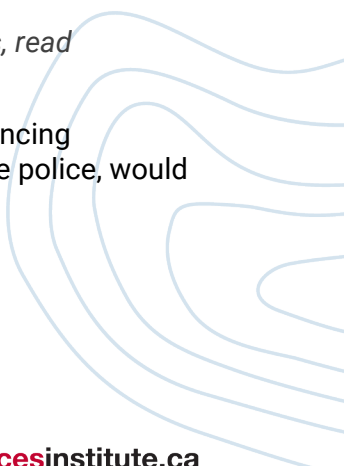
Additionally, two participants described developing their abilities to not let these experiences bother them anymore and avoid perpetrators of racism.

*"Feels like I'm over it, don't let it bother me. I've experienced it my whole life. Before, growing up - Felt less in myself. Now I know it's just society so doesn't let it bother me anymore"*

The main way participants described coping with discrimination was talking with friends or family. For example,

*"Talk about it with friends/family. But prefers to be alone – watch movies, read novels. Family is always there to support me"*

None of the participants had ever made a formal complaint or report after experiencing discrimination. Two participants expressed the belief that reporting, such as to the police, would not receive a positive response or result in any changes.





## Envisioning the Future

Finally, when asked about their perspectives of the future, there was consensus among participants that Huron County would not be free of discrimination.

*“Can’t really tell, but I don’t think so. People are different – people are nice, and others aren’t. Can’t educate/try to change everyone. Can’t change everyone’s perception about Black people”*

*“We can’t change the people- and these people give it to their kids. No one is born with hate in them and how they discriminate is out of hate. I just have to adapt and accept because I am the minority in Huron... It was bred into these people they don’t see any different”*

At the same time, there was a shared sentiment of hope that the situation could improve through measures such as stronger leadership, more outreach and representation, zero tolerance for discrimination, educating the public, and lifting the voices of those who have experienced discrimination.

## Conclusion

Although Canada is a culturally and racially diverse country, residents of Huron County are experiencing discrimination. This study is limited by the number of respondents, however, all of them had various experiences of discrimination. These instances are not isolated occurrences. A 2021 study that provided quantitative data about experiences of discrimination in Huron and Perth Counties identified that 68.7 per cent of immigrants and/or visible minorities had experienced an act of discrimination in the past three years (Lapshina & Esses, 2021). That study also identified that the places where discriminatory acts frequently occurred were workplaces, stores, schools, and health care settings, along with arenas, libraries, banks, restaurants, and other locations. Therefore, action needs to be taken to address these injustices. Creating a more welcoming and inclusive community is necessary to support the well-being of racial minorities, immigrants, and Indigenous peoples living in Huron County.

Future research and/or evaluation, to follow up on the effectiveness of any interventions, will be useful to monitor the rates of discrimination over time.



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